DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 337 026 FL 019 693

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TITLE Reading Attitudes in Asian ESL Learners.
PUB DATE Aug 90
NOTE 88p.; Master's Thesis, University of Northern Iowa.
PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses - Masters Theses (042) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Literacy; *Adult Students; Asian Americans; *English (Second Language); Illiteracy; Laotians; Questionnaires; *Reading Attitudes; Reading Skills; *Second Language Instruction; *Student Attitudes; Teaching Methods; Vietnamese People

ABSTRACT

Factors were studied that influence attitudes of Asian English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) learners in order to better understand possible reasons why attitudes may change and ways they may be influenced. Special attention was given to cultural and education differences, difficulties relating to nonliterate adult learners, and strategies to assist ESL learners. A survey of 30 adult Asian ESL students from Laos and Vietnam provided demographic and attitudinal information, and findings indicated that cultural and educational differences between Southeast Asian and American learners can have an impact on reading attitudes. Frustration was reported in several areas: believing that pronunciation, not meaning, is the purpose for reading; lack of concentration due to survival problems; lack of vocabulary; grammatical differences; and frustration with time needed to become fluent. Useful strategies were identified, including: providing relevant materials; incorporating vocational ESL as proof that language training is useful; using of multiethnic or multicultural education; and using of students' background knowledge. Contains 36 references. (Author/LB)

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ED337026

READING ATTITUDES IN ASIAN ESL LEARNERS

A Thesis

Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

Rebecca Ann Kamm

University of Northern Iowa

August 1990

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READING ATTITUDES IN ASIAN ESL LEARNERS

An Abstract of a Thesis

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify factors influencing attitudes of Asian English as a Second Language (ESL) learners to better understand possible reasons why attitudes may change and ways they may be influenced. Research regarding reading attitudes was investigated, particularly in regard to cultural and educational differences, special difficulties relating to nonliterate adult learners were explored, and strategies to assist ESL learners presented. A survey was administered which gave subjects the opportunity to state their self-perceptions of themselves as readers.

The population of the study consisted of 30 adult Asian ESL students from Laos and Vietnam residing in a small, midwestern community. The survey asking students to provide demographic information, along with personal feelings regarding reading, was used to assess reading attitude.

Survey results verified the review of literature. Findings indicated that cultural and educational differences between SE Asian and American learners can have an impact on reading attitudes in ESL students.

According to responses by local subjects, causes of change in reading attitude from positive to negative appear to be related to frustration dealing with believing pronounciation, not meaning, to be the purpose for reading,

difficulty in concentrating on education when immediate survival problems are apparent, seeing a stronger need for oral skills, lack of vocabulary, grammatical differences, and declining interest due to not understanding what was read. Subjects who were fluent readers in their native language expressed frustration when not quickly becoming fluent in English.

Several implications regarding assisting ESL students in maintaining positive attitudes were drawn from this study. First, due to the high amount of respect given teachers in Asian cultures, American teachers are in a strong position to encourage Asian students and influence attitudes of mainstream students. Second, providing relevant materials which are meaningful to students will help maintain interest. Third, when assisting nonliterate adult students, vocational ESL can provide proof that language training is useful. Fourth, the use of multiethnic or multicultural education can help all students understand their own culture as well as others. Finally, the continued use of students' background knowledge and interest can give students a sense of belonging and understanding in a second language.

Using such strategies should prove useful in increasing acceptance of minority students and at the same time assist them in understanding a new language and culture. Potential

cultural and educational problems that may threaten student attitude toward English can therefore be lessened, allowing students to advance to their fullest.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express appreciation to the individuals who assisted me during inception and completion of my thesis.

Special thanks to Dr. Ned Ratekin, advisor and chairperson of my thesis committee, for his continued support and understanding and to advisory committee members, Dr. Jeannie Steele and Dr. Cheryl Roberts, for their assistance. Technical assistance from Joyce Taylor was also appreciated.

Thanks to my family, Dave, Lisa, and Karl Kamm and Donna and Ken Peterson, for understanding the importance of my education.

Fond memories are directed toward Nina Magnuson, an ESL teacher who encouraged me by her caring and professional example.

Also thanks to my English as a Second Language students throughout my years as a teacher for helping me to understand the learning process and particularly my godson, Cheuang Kavan, who is always an inspiration to me.

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

From September 1975 to September 1989 approximately 918,600 Southeast Asian refugees have resettled in the United States (L. Gordon, Office of Refugee Resettlement, personal communication, January 24, 1990). According to the Refugee Act of 1980 a refugee is defined as an individual having a "well-founded fear of persecution." Refugees have fled their home countries due to "political and ethnic persecution, human rights abuses, famine, and poverty." Many have suffered long years of "reeducation" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1989, p. 7-8).

In addition to the large number of refugees who have resettled in the United States, there are currently approximately 625,780 additional SE Asian refugees who have been identified as in need of protection and/or assistance (U.S. Committee for Refugees, 1989). This number does not include refugees from other countries. In 1988 alone, a total of 35,083 SE Asian refugees were admitted into the United States representing 46% of the total refugee admittance (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1989). Applications for political asylum increased by 42% in 1988, which revealed that the number of refugees arriving

in the United States is far from lessening (U.S. Committee for Refugees, 1989).

Southeast Asian refugees have settled in every state and several territories of the United States. At the close of fiscal year 1988, the median age of the resident population of people who had arrived as refugees was 26. The majority were in an age range of 24-65, while 25% were children. Dominant refugees groups are from Vietnam, while other Southeast Asians come from Laos and Cambodia (U.S Department of Health and Human Services, 1989).

Just meeting the criteria of being labeled a refugee, however, does not create an entitlement to enter the United States. The annual admissions program is a legal mechanism for admitting an applicant who is among those persons for whom the United States has a special concern, is eligible under one of those priorities applicable to his/her situation, and meets the definition of a refugee under the Act, as determined by an officer of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Such eligibility is also determined by immigration quotas. The world-wide refugee admissions ceiling for the U.S. was set at 94,000 for fiscal year 1989 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1989).

As a result of this massive influx of Asian refugees into our society, many challenges have been presented, not only for the refugee families, but also for educators of

children and adults. Dealing with a new culture can be difficult due to the language barrier as well as the cultural barrier.

Immigrants are faced with many adjustment problems. Such individuals must learn enough English in order to communicate with teachers, sponsors, and peers. They must compare and sort out cultural differences. They must learn new ways of "behaving, thinking, and learning" (Wei, 1977, p. 11).

Elements such as food, clothing, and shelter that are typically taken for granted become immediate needs. Adjustments to such things as climate and food must be made. The options for making a living usually include an entry level job or welfare. A whole new way of life must be learned and cross-cultural problems will be experienced. Loneliness and frustration may become an everyday occurrence (Wei, 1977).

The lives of refugee students have been significantly shaped by the traumas of war and violence, racism, and economic struggle (First, 1988). During the process of escaping birth countries, refugees were faced with dangers of death, separation, and deprivations. Many refugees have been separated from their families with little hope of meeting them again. Such tragic experiences have left their

mark on these immigrants, leaving them with the "fear and anxiety of an unknown future" (Wei, 1977, p. 11).

Racial tensions have been faced across the country between new-comers and native-born Americans and among immigrant groups themselves (First, 1988). Refugees who had hoped to leave war experiences behind to come to a free country may encounter prejudice which they don't understand.

Numerous aspects of one's personal life are affected. While attempting to acquire English as a new language, Trueba (1987) believes that refugees often realize:

> they are not dealing with changes in sound units, syntactic forms, or the meaning of words and sentences. They discover that they are dealing with an entirely different world conception, which classifies behavioral phenomena and expresses emotions in different ways. At that point they are confronted with the challenge of acquiring an entirely different culture, which they often view as being in conflict with their own. (p. 3)

The role of education in alternative lifestyles and cultures has yet to be understood. Refugees have been arriving in the United States with mixed educational backgrounds, varying languages, and different cultures, making it difficult for educators to group students or become knowledgeable about all aspects of each ethnic group. These students are carrying emotional burdens unknown to many and have been forced by circumstances to assume responsibilities they aren't ready for and to resettle far from family and friends (First, 1988).

In addition to the emotional, cultural, and social differences, students must adjust to differences in educational systems of birth countries and the United States. According to Wei (1977) the three categories of educational difficulties faced by students include different learning styles and classroom activities, a change in the student-teacher relationship, and the language barrier.

The problem of how to assist nontraditional students in becoming successful and the question of why some Asian refugees find success in school but not others have not been fully explored. Some students, particularly at the high school level, excel and win competitions over students born and raised in America. However, due to the language difference and the trauma of past experiences, there are other Asian students who feel there are barriers which cause them to drop out of school (Divoky, 1988).

As educators, solutions to such problems can be important in helping students set and reach goals. There is a need to increase student opportunity to learn and realize when other cultural barriers are taking priority over educational pursuits.

Statement of the Problem

In order to enhance instructional effectiveness, there is a need to identify the background experiences and attitudes of refugee learners as a basis for instructional planning and interaction. The purpose of this study is to identify factors influencing reading attitudes in Asian ESL learners in order to better understand possible reasons why attitudes may change and ways they may be influenced.

Specifically, this research addressed the following questions:

1. What cultural differences appear to have an impact on attitude?

2. What educational differences appear to have an impact on attitude?

3. What are the causes of changes in attitude among adult Asian students?

4. How do attitudes affect reading behavior?

Significance of the Study

The goal of this study is to identify the self-perceptions and attitudes of Asian ESL learners in regard to reading in order to discover reasons for attrition and take steps which might emerge significant in understanding perceptions and reasons for attrition.

Assumptions

Basic assumptions relevant to the study include:

1. Questions were understood by the respondents and answered honestly.

2. Those surveyed have similar backgrounds and responses to others of the same population group.

Limitations of the Study

1. All individuals involved in the study came to the United States as refugees and initially resettled in one specific geographic area (Decorah, Iowa) or subsequently moved to this area.

2. Information was received by form of a questionnaire in which respondents self-reported on a volunteer basis.

3. Questionnaires were completed by respondents of several Asian backgrounds including Thai Dam, ethnic Chinese from Vietnam, Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Laotian. No other ethnic groups were surveyed.

4. The survey included a small number of subjects (30).

Definition of Terms

For purposes of this study the following terms will be used:

Southeast Asian

Individuals from countries in Southeast Asia including Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

Refugees

Individuals who have fled their birth countries due to a well-rounded fear of persecution (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1989).

English as a Second Language (ESL)

A structured language acquisition program designed to teach English to students whose native language is other than English (State of Iowa, 1988).

Mainstream

The placement of students in the least restrictive environment or the educational setting in which they can perform academically and socially as normally as possible (Dillard, Kinnison, & Peel, 1980).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study is to conduct an analysis of the self-perceptions and attitudes of Asian ESL learners in regard to reading. The magnitude of the problem has been presented with regard to the numbers of refugees who have resettled in the United States. Included in this chapter is the review of literature which will attempt to identify background experiences, attitudes, and problems of adjustment in order to use this information for instructional planning. Discussion in this chapter will include cultural background and implications, cultural reading implications, and educational background and implications.

Cultural Background

According to Finocchiaro (1975):

> Research workers and teachers know that all learners at whatever age level enter English programs in possession of a perfectly adequate first language and of a cultural background which they cherish because these represent badges of self-identity and of group affiliation. They know, too, that, depending upon the students' ages and their home-community and previous school experiences, their attitude toward learning cannot help but be affected by the political, economic and racial problems of the society from which they have come and of that in which the school is located. (pp. 40-41)

In our classrooms today, there are students of many backgrounds and ethnic groups. One difference between ESL

students and mainstream students is that cultural differences are often so diverse that misunderstandings frequently arise. Understanding cultural implications regarding education is imperative for teachers as such understanding can lead to instruction regarding cultural differences which can in turn help to bridge gaps between cultures.

The Asian learner traditionally coming to school for the first time feels positive and excited, although most likely nervous. This positive attitude stems from the high respect placed on education and teachers in the birth country. However, conflicts may soon arise when students are placed in an education setting that varies greatly in attitude and appearance. Some general cultural background is presented which may be useful to educators.

Harmonious relationships are very important to most Asian people (Dinh, 1981). Finding it difficult to say no directly, they are often subtle when dealing with unpleasant matters. Using a direct approach, such as is often preferred by Americans, may be considered rude by Asian students. In order to maintain harmony, a student might say he or she understands or answer positively. To say no might imply the teacher has not fulfilled his obligation and could cause the teacher to lose face, which must be avoided at all costs. This cultural difference may create difficulties for

American teachers who feel confused as to what a student really feels. In dealing with maintaining harmony, a friend may be instrumental in relaying insight about a person's feelings. The indirect approach is often preferred.

In keeping harmony, general avoidance of violence is common practice, which includes injuring another's self-respect. In resolving a conflict, a polite evasion on both sides may be acceptable. Form is preserved and pride is not harmed (Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service [LIRS], 1982). Some Americans not understanding this indirection may tend to misinterpret evasion for untruthfulness.

Form or appearance is also important (Dinh, 1981). The way something is done may be more important than the outcome. Emotions are not readily shown. A smile or laughter could mean embarrassment or misunderstanding, rather than a sign something is funny (Duong, 1975). Anger or hurt feelings might be hidden by silence. A student may not readily express his opinions or feelings through words or gestures. Even when verbalizing feelings, a different manner may be used than what is used by Americans. For example, a simple thank you or smile might be used to express appreciation. In general, initial relationships with Asian students may at times seem more formal than relationships with Caucasian students due to this cultural implication (Dinh, 1981).

Students may be reticent about speaking for fear of being wrong or losing face. Children are generally not encouraged to compete (Lopez-Valadez, 1985). Sometimes teachers may see this as apparent lack of independence, assertiveness, or creativity, not realizing a cultural difference.

It may be offensive to touch or be touched by another person, particularly someone of the opposite sex. Public displays of affection between boyfriend and girlfriend are considered immoral (LIRS, 1982). Therefore, students may feel embarrassed when required to sit next to or work with members of the opposite sex.

The teacher has traditionally been a high authority figure, respected by parents and students alike. Parents usually have complete trust in the teacher. Authority figures, including elders and teachers, are expected to always be right (LIRS, 1982). Therefore, a student would not feel comfortable questioning a teacher as it might imply disrespect. For example, in Vietnamese schools students rarely volunteer answers to teachers' questions because of fear of "losing face" or "showing off" (Christian, 1983, p. 49). Due to this cultural impact, many students may wait to be told what to do instead of taking the initiative. This aspect of the teacher as all-knowing can become stressful

for American teachers, particularly if they are expected to solve personal as well as academic problems.

In Asia, teachers were often responsible for moral training of children and instrumental in helping to mold personalities. It was common for males to have received an education through Buddhist monks. These students received spiritual as well as academic training (Vixaysakd, 1973). Therefore, students might expect similar guidance from American teachers.

Asian people are very gracious. It is considered an honor to cook for friends. When gifts are given, individuals may feel obligated to give a gift in return (Dinh, 1981). If a gift is offered to the teacher, an Asian student would most likely feel offended if not accepted.

Names vary among Asian ethnic groups. Teachers should be aware that many ethnic groups sign their family name first (Duong, 1975). People may call each other by title such as aunt or cousin instead of by first names. A husband and wife might not share the same family name. Therefore, students must be taught the proper form of address used in this country so as not to be embarrassed. Teachers must also be sensitive to the proper way to address students.

Although many different forms of religion are practiced in Asia, many people have a background in Buddhism. Within this religion, personal strength can be developed by

increasing one's character. The best way to strengthen character is to accumulate merit by doing good deeds. A person is judged by his good and bad deeds, which are irrevocable. Therefore, errors and harsh words are not soon forgotten. In contrast to common beliefs in our society, devout Buddhists tend to feel "no compulsion to improve life. They firmly believe that life is good if it is accepted" (LIRS, 1982, p. 11). It can be a challenge for teachers to convince students with such a background that one's life can be changed.

Students originating from an Eastern culture may have superstitions that are unfamiliar in the West, such as belief in spirits. Consequences that might occur could include a student's fear during a field trip to a museum because of equating old relics with belonging to a person now deceased or a nature hike in the woods could turn sour if a student has superstitions regarding spirits.

Disagreements are resolved through "mutual probing and explanation that enables the parties to reach a common definition of the situation" (LIRS, 1982, p. 16). If this is impossible, both parties may withdraw and "leave the problem unresolved, with the hope that time and circumstances will remove the issue altogether, or that one side will ultimately see the light" (LIRS, 1982, p. 16). Often a third party or clan members may be asked to

negotiate. The decision reached is considered final. This cultural background information can be particularly beneficial for teachers when problems arise. One must be careful never to allow an Asian student to lose face or he may be ostracized by the community.

The family unit is very important. The father or oldest male usually has authority over all family members and makes decisions on major affairs, although the wife may have an equal footing with her husband on some matters (Dinh, 1981). Asian parents are in general less permissive that American parents. Girls receive strict supervision and learn household duties from mothers at an early age. Older brothers and sisters are expected to set examples for and often help raise younger ones. The authority of the parent is "sacred and unqualified." Even in the United States, marriages may still be arranged by parents. The extended family also plays an important part in one's life (LIRS, 1982, p. 18).

The family group extends to individuals within the clan. Financial assistance to a relative is regarded as "part of the natural order of things" (LIRS, 1982, p. 19). Hospitality is offered without question. Invitations are not customary.

Punctuality is not as adhered to in many parts of Southeast Asia as in the United States (LIRS, 1982).

Knowing this to be a cultural difference, teachers need to be involved in teaching the importance of being on time, rather than admonishing students for being late.

In Southeast Asia, most people were used to being self-sufficient before the war, and to ask for help was often considered shameful. Some students still feel reticent about asking for assistance. A receptive teacher may see a need before it is expressed.

For some ethnic groups, such as the Hmong of Laos, literacy was not needed in a small, village culture. As the war progressed in Southeast Asia, education often became even more sporatic. It was unlikely that residents in rural areas could receive a formal education (National Indochinese Clearinghouse, 1978). Refugees who lived in refugee camps in Thailand, Malaysia, or other areas usually have not been able to receive education with any consistency. Therefore, large areas of background knowledge may be missing, making school even more difficult.

Cultural Implications

Asian students placed in an American educational setting have prior knowledge and experience in their own culture. What they require is a complete orientation to a new culture in addition to language training. Even with cultural orientation, a refugee coming to the United States, along with those resettling in other countries, is apt to

experience culture shock, which normally occurs 6 to 12 months after arriving in this country. "He is suddenly faced with the realization of the total disparity between what he has known before and his current life." The reaction may range from "over-enthusiastic embrace of everything American to a dissatisfaction with everything" (National Indochinese Clearinghouse, 1978, p. 30). Signs of culture shock can include strong emotional reactions and disorientation.

A second potential crisis may occur 1 1/2 to 2 years after a refugee has arrived in the United States and realizes that he will never go back home and will forever be separated from his native land, family, and friends. Feeling that he will never cope with life in the United States and unhappy with lack of fluency in a new language, frustration and alienation may become apparent (National Indochinese Clearinghouse, 1978). With patience and understanding, these feelings may pass.

Even the language itself has cultural aspects which must be addressed. "Different languages develop their different vocabularies by cutting up the reality which their speakers experience according to the needs of these speakers" (Mackey, 1973, p. 10). Due to lifestyles and cultures different than ours, Asian students may have different concepts regarding not only life in general, but

also vocabulary used to describe experiences. It isn't always a simple matter to translate one word into another language.

According to Mackey (1973):

> Language is not only a matter of words; it is much more. In fact, one of the greatest errors to make about a language is to identify it with its dictionary. Words are indeed the easiest part of the language, but there is also the question of knowing how to put them together and to utter the resulting sequences. (p. 11)

Knowing the words of a new language isn't enough. Languages use different patterns and arrangements. Sentences can't always be translated word for word. Several Asian languages consist of characters rather than letters, making written English even more difficult to comprehend.

In a traditional learning environment, the teacher uses the language of the home. In the case of a second language learner, the student is at a disadvantage as he doesn't have the same "learning equipment" as students from homes where both languages are identical. Mackey (1973) states:

> The differences may be felt in a great range of difficulties, from a slight lack of comprehension to complete unintelligibility. The teacher does not have the words with which to teach, and the learner does not have the vocabulary through which he can learn. (p. 15)

Children and adults may become confused when children are taught ideas different than what they were raised believing. Children may receive conflicting messages from parents and relatives at home and from teachers and peers at school (Christian, 1983). One's cultural identity may be

threatened, particularly if expected to give up a part of the original culture.

Another confusing adjustment to make deals with the roles of family members. Traditionally, the oldest Asian male is the leader of the household and is the authority figure. When beginning ESL classes in the United States, he may be in the same class with his wife and children. How will he feel when all members are expected to address each other orally in the same familiar tone during drills? What can he do if other members of the family surpass him in English? Making errors in the classroom could cause him to lose face with family members who once looked up to him.

When the children are able to function in English and the parents are not, the traditional family authority structure begins to break down causing tension within the family (LIRS, 1982). This can also cause breakdown of the extended family. The generational conflict that is common in our culture can become even more serious for Asian families. Parents may not yet have an understanding of American culture, while children attending public school are emersed each day. This may result in children becoming acculturated sooner than parents (Christian, 1983). A parent may feel that his children's knowledge of English has resulted in his losing control and may place blame on and resent the language itself.

Some children, due to their fluency in English, have been used as interpreters for parents with fewer English skills. This may cause an even greater rift in the family as children sometimes misinterpret, do not repeat the total message, or become decision makers. Whenever possible, it is suggested to use an adult as an interpreter.

Relationships between husbands and wives may also become strained. An Asian woman coming from a traditional family may be more subservient than women in America. She may see American women on equal terms with men and wish for the same freedom. Her husband may resent such a change and the traditional structure of the family could become disorganized.

Since English is the major international language and the United States is a powerful country, most refugees come here with high expectations and good feelings about beginning life anew. Some Asian parents send a child out of the country with the hopes he will resettle here, become successful, and send for the rest of the family. However, expectations may not match reality and attitudes may change drastically.

One theory on language learning motivation (Lambert & Gardner, 1972) is that a second language learner:

> must be psychologically prepared to adopt various aspects of behavior which characterize members of another linguistic-cultural group. The learner's ethnocentric tendencies and his attitudes toward the

> member of the other group are believed to determine how successful he will be, relatively, in learning the new language. (p. 3)

Therefore, a new student may feel he isn't accepted because he looks, dresses, and speaks differently than others in the new culture. Some American customs may appear rude and, due to language barriers, misunderstandings may arise which could make a refugee mistrustful or standoffish toward Americans.

The manner in which a person is orientated into the language task can also help determine his success in learning a new language. Motivation may stem from something outside the individual, such as being convinced English skills will help in employment advancement. However, motivation may be intrinsic and the student may wish to learn more about the other cultural community "because he is interested in it in an open-minded way, to the point of eventually being accepted as a member of that other group" (Lambert & Gardner, 1972, p. 3).

Motivation is defined by Finocchiaro (1982) as:

> the feeling nurtured primarily by the classroom teacher in the learning situation as he or she engages in carefully planned as well as empirical and intuitive practices which will satisfy one or more of the basic, universal, cognitive, and affective human needs identified by psychologists such as Maslow: the need for survival, belonging, identity, self-esteem, and self-actualization. (p. 59)

Therefore, teaching ESL is more than just teaching a new language. It must encompass teaching a whole new

culture in such a manner as to make material relevant and personal to learners.

Learning a language fluently takes time--something that older learners may feel is running out on them. For such learners, their jobs, well-being, and future depend upon their ability to master a new language. Many are confronted with what seems an impossible task. According to Mackey (1973):

> Some have no aptitude whatsoever for languages; others feel too old to learn a new one. Many thousands of middle-aged refugees, for example, who in their own countries were successful and respected business and professional men, have had to accept what they consider manual and degrading work because they cannot meet the new professional requirements. (pp. 16-17)

Especially for a professional person, learning English is not just for everyday communication. "Psychologically, an immigrant of this type lives in a sort of twilight world, midway between that of his homeland and that of his adopted country. His language handicap penetrates the very structure of his personality" (Mackey, 1973, p. 17).

As a refugee is thrown into new situations with English, he may begin to feel that his native tongue is less important. Due to fewer opportunities to use his first language, particularly reading and writing, his first language may become less familiar. He sees and feels things the same as in his native country, but no longer has the vocabulary to express those same feelings. New experiences and objects outside the context of his culture might have no

corresponding words. An adult who was once adept at using language for handling all experience may feel frustrated at no longer being able to do so. Mackey (1973) states:

> But he sees and hears and feels as he does largely because his language habits have made him look at things through the spectacles of his mother tongue, as it were, as it is these original language habits, so much a part of his thoughts and feelings, that stand in the way of complete mastery of the new language. For the adult immigrant, the second language, no matter how well he learns to speak it, may always remain but an outer skin without depth and human warmth. (p. 17)

Even when a second language is learned, innermost thoughts and feelings are kept in the first language. Fond memories are of events expressed in the first language. Especially in a classroom where there are only drills and rote exercises, English has little chance of becoming personal to students.

Cultural Reading Implications

There are therefore several cultural aspects to consider when an ESL student begins reading. A student who attends class for the first time may have a strong, positive attitude toward education and reading. However, this attitude often changes when reality doesn't match expectations or when students feel misunderstood and frustrated.

One reason for attitude change deals with family pressures faced by students. They may be pressured by family members to maintain their own culture while teachers

and peers insist on American cultural behavior (Christian, 1983).

The purpose for reading in a second language may differ from reading in a first language. One problem in this area may be the textbook. The teaching of reading in an ESL class may emphasize the language itself, rather than reading strategies. Therefore, the text may be one which "helps the teacher to present or practice specific linguistic items" such as vocabulary and sentence structure. Even though reading for the purpose of building vocabulary and improving sentence structure can help "extend our command of a language," this is not an "authentic use" of a text. "Outside the classroom most of our reading is not done with this purpose, and it is certainly not the purpose for which most writers are writing" (Nuttall, 1982, p. 19).

Another problem is that the second language is often taught by expressing information that the learner already has. Typically, language is used to express new information to the learner. This discrepency may make the new language "boring and unnecessary to the students who are obliged to learn it" (Nuttall, 1982, p. 20). For beginning learners, language may need to be presented in terms of familiar information. However, instructors should be aware of when students move beyond a beginning stage of learning and realize:

> There ought to be little need to subject learners to language that carries no message for them. Texts even for early stages can be made a great deal more informative than many of them are at present; and by the intermediate stage, you should be demanding for your students texts which, however simple in language, have a message that is fresh and interesting. (Nuttall, 1982, p. 20)

As children in public schools mature and move into upper elementary grades, emphasis is placed on silent rather than oral reading. Reading in an ESL classroom is often done in order to improve oral skills. It becomes an established part of the lesson and commonly persists for longer than is desirable. "This means that too little time is given to developing the skill of silent reading; yet all readers need this skill, and most would benefit from help in developing it" (Nuttall, 1982, p. 22). Therefore, the purpose of reading for meaning is sometimes disregarded as teachers use reading to teach pronunciation.

Educational Background

Students coming from an eductional system in the East may find schools quite different in the West and face adjustment problems to the system itself. These problems may be evident in both ESL and mainstream classes.

One difficulty faced by foreign students is that "the American educational system itself is a cultural invention. It is one which serves primarily to prepare middle-class children to participate in their own culture" (Saville-Troike, 1975, p. 85). Often the culture of the Asian

student is not taken into consideration and teachers aren't trained to deal with the needs of culturally diverse students.

Such students may be seen as deficient or "intellectually or emotionally handicapped" due to lack of understanding of the English language when in fact they have been "fully functioning" individuals in their own school and society (Duong, 1975, p. 3).

Therefore, an ESL teacher has a large responsibility to "learn to respect and be able to deal with the culturally different backgrounds which children bring to school" (Saville-Troike, 1975, p. 86). Knowing about such differences will allow teachers to assist students in understanding not only the educational system, but also to make the right choices and behave appropriately in different situations. "Every teacher of English as a second language is in the position of teaching a second culture as well, and every one should be able to fill the roll of a cross-cultural interpreter in addition to serving as a second language instructor" (Saville-Troike, 1975, p. 86).

Teaching the language isn't all that's necessary. The American culture itself must be presented to students "since such enculturation is the essential purpose of education in all cultures" (Saville-Troike, 1975, p. 85).

The idea of education itself is not the same in all cultures. For example, Vietnamese scholars have stated that respect for learning is given "primordial importance" to Vietnamese people because education alone determines social positions and job opportunities. "A very rich man without a good education is not highly regarded by the Vietnamese" (Wei, 1977, p. 3).

Due to this importance, "the respect given to scholars and the veneration of book study have meant the passive acceptance of knowledge." The teacher is usually seen as someone who has all the answers. Therefore, it would be disrespectful to question a teacher. While this feeling provokes positive aspects such as a high level of respect toward teachers and a tendency to work hard, it can also cause problems such as making the learner more passive, "relying more on listening, watching and imitating" rather than "experimenting, trying things out, and generally discovering things for himself" (Wei, 1977, p. 3). This respect can also cause a student to become overly dependent on his teacher.

American teachers observing such learners might assume that they are not innovative, creative, or don't understand English (Wei, 1977). This situation can put stress on students who have not previously experienced free speech in the classroom, particularly if required to participate in

class discussion or make oral presentations. However, a knowledgeable teacher can help students make a transition by drawing them out without pressuring them to speak.

A related problem is that even when Asian students participate orally, they may be misunderstood because of language or accent differences and hesitate to set themselves up for what they see as failure. Again, this is due to the cultural impact of maintaining harmony. Different cultures disagree as to when students should speak.

> The school supports the convention of talking one at a time (after raising a hand and being called on) and not interrupting; other cultures would consider that rude, a sure sign that no one was interested in what the primary speaker was saying. Some cultures feel it is inappropriate for children to talk at all in the presence of adults, and others that it is inappropriate for women to talk in the presence of men. (Saville-Troike, 1975, p. 87)

Asian students may have unrealistic expectations of American teachers. In general, American teachers may act and even dress more casual than Asian teachers. Teachers from Asian countries are often more apt to keep a professional distance from their students unlike American instructors who sometimes develop friendships with students (Lopez-Valadez, 1985).

In general, Eastern schools are more inflexible than American schools and many Asian schools had limited program offerings. An Asian student may feel very confused when

experiencing the amount of freedom American students have. He may not feel comfortable eating in the cafeteria because of the noise and different food. Changing clothes in a physical education class may seem immodest. Selecting one's own classes may also seem confusing for students not used to doing so. Even curriculum may appear inappropriate to students who are used to strict academic subjects like science, math, and foreign language when courses include such topics as human sexuality, interpersonal relationships, and public speaking (Duong, 1975). Co-education can seem an embarrassment to Asian students, particularly when students of opposite sex are required to sit next to each other and work closely together on class projects (Duong, 1975).

Another difficulty faced by ESL students is use of inappropriate material or material presented in unfamiliar ways. Particularly in rural areas in SE Asia, textbooks were "fairly expensive and school library facilities were nonexistent" (Duong, 1975, p. 18). The teacher often dictated the lesson, which students would copy. Therefore, ESL students in American schools are not experienced in reading long assignments individually or researching information. Teachers need to assist students in shifting attitudes toward being responsible for their own education rather than relying on teachers to provide information.

Strong emphasis on study skills and library skills should be valuable to students making this transition.

Texts used to teach a second language may contain defects which can ultimately discourage learners. Because of emphasis made on drilling, texts may tend to use various examples to make a point thereby becoming contrived. "Over-familiar" topics may be used which are intended to indicate how certain facts are expressed in the second language rather than carry a message (Nuttall, 1982, p. 19). The object of oral reading, to gain meaning, is lost and skills such as inference and main idea are not included.

One aspect of textbooks which is not always considered during selection is the choice of illustrations. When first learning a new language, students may place strong emphasis on illustrations to assist in determining understanding. If illustrations are biased or sexist, they may cause students to have little faith in the text itself. Some illustrators do not attempt to portray minorities, or may picture them in stereotypical roles. Other illustrations may be offensive to students coming from a traditional and conservative background. Especially when working with students who are nonliterate, consider that such students may need instruction in illustrations themselves, not realizing that meaning can be derived from pictures, charts, graphs, etc. (Haverson & Haynes, 1982). Some pictorial material may be

crudely drawn and be misinterpreted or may not mean the same to people from different cultures (Massad & Lewis, 1975). Therefore, it's necessary to consider the audience before presenting textbooks.

Testing is another problem in the educational system which may cause difficulty. Some tests are culturally biased; written and normed for students with middle class Caucasian backgrounds (Massad & Lewis, 1975). Such tests assume students have had certain experiences, even if they are not necessarily common for all Americans and particularly those with a foreign background.

Even with tests which are not biased, items may be ambiguous or poorly constructed, causing misunderstanding. Instructions may be misunderstood by students with little experience in test-taking. Students may see a test with different conceptions and interpretations (Massad & Lewis, 1975). Asian students would be most likely to see an exam as a way to determine a student's knowledge of factual information and would feel confused when given a critical thinking essay test, for example. Standardized, multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, and true-false items may not generally have been part of formal education techniques (Lopez-Valadez, 1985). Therefore, it's important for teachers to teach students how to take tests in addition to presenting material that will be tested.

Due to the language barrier, even students who are familiar with the American testing system may need more time to complete tests than traditional students (Massad & Lewis, 1975). A receptive teacher could encourage questions during tests relating to meaning of questions to prevent misinterpretation. In the case of beginning students, a teacher might consider reading and explaining all questions.

Another difficulty with testing is that it may be used inappropriately to keep students from advancing rather than judging what a student has learned in the classroom. IQ and similar tests may measure students' knowledge of the American culture rather than strict intelligence (Trueba, 1987).

Physical aspects of the classroom environment may also affect students. Just as included in textbook materials, pictures and diagrams in classrooms should be multicultural, unbiased, and appropriate for all students.

Even though parental interest regarding education is extremely high with Asian parents as has already been discussed, this is one area which is often ignored by schools. Due to the respect for and confidence in teachers, "Asian parents are often reluctant to challenge a teacher's authority." Particularly parents with limited English skills or those new to this country may lack knowledge about American society and customs, adding to their "insecurity

and confusion regarding their children's education" (Yao, 1988, p. 224).

To increase parental involvement, Yao suggests that "school personnel need to take the initiative" to build "partnerships" with parents. Strategies include conducting seminars in parents' native tongues, publishing a newsletter, using parents as teacher aides and resources for demonstrations and presentations, encouraging parents to organize cultural events and school fund-raising activities, and encouraging participation in parent/teacher conferences (Yao, 1988, pp. 224-225). Benefits to increased parental involvement would include strengthening positive attitudes toward school and increasing learning activities at home.

Nonliterate Adult Learners

While assisting students with a different educational background can prove difficult, the problems of adults with no or limited education in their birth language are even greater. In addition to learning the basics of the written language, adults must become acquainted with English oral patterns as well. At the same time, these students may be concerned with survival matters. For nonliterate adults, the task of trying to cope with our print-oriented society is "virtually impossible." "Not only must they possess certain minimal literacy skills to meet the demands of daily

life in this country, but they must learn a new language at the same time" (Haverson & Hayes, 1982, p. 1).

While it is suggested that teaching native-language literacy first may prove valuable to retaining cultural heritage and learning a second language (Behrens, 1983), this may not prove possible in American classrooms. Such learners may encounter special difficulties since they'll need to become familiar with the sounds of the English language, vocabulary, how to form sentences, structure, and correct usage (Haverson & Haynes, 1982).

Before beginning literacy training, students must have some instruction in the spoken language so as to be able to associate the sounds with the written symbols (Behrens, 1983). Without this knowledge, the letters or words being taught will have no context or meaning. Prereading skills are also valuable in assisting learners to feel comfortable with a new language.

Since reading, writing, and speaking are all necessary for survival in our society, it is important that adults receive training in all aspects of literacy. Realizing the difficulty faced by nonliterate students, educators need to remember that adults learn differently than children and that they enter into educational tasks with a greater amount of background experiences and more specific and immediate plans for applying newly acquired knowledge (Mocker, 1980).

To assist adult learners in remaining motivated, it is important to show students the relevancy of learning in "real life" and how to apply skills immediately by using speaking, listening, writing, and reading interchangeably. Adults need to work toward independence and self-direction (E. Newton, 1980), learning how to transfer classroom skills into life skills (Mocker, 1980).

The extent and nature of a student's interest may be influenced by the view he has formed of the usefulness of English to him personally as well as to society generally (Massad, 1975). If opportunities to participate in English activities outside class are not available, student interest may be lost.

Nonliterate adults may also enter the class unprepared to function in a formal classroom environment and with poor self-images of themselves as learners (Haverson & Haynes, 1982). Teaching them how to concentrate and building confidence in their ability to learn would prove helpful in preparing students for the classroom setting. Teachers should not assume that students can follow directions or work with others in groups as well as independently since many nonliterate adults have learned in the past through experience instead of abstractions (Haverson & Haynes, 1982).

One reason for low self-esteem of nonliterate adults and negative feelings toward education, may be the frustration that develops in families where children are acquiring English more rapidly than the parents (Behrens, 1983). Adults may be unwilling to take risks in the classroom because they are afraid of humiliation or embarrassment, particularly if other family members are in the same class.

When working with adults, it is especially important to remember that people learn in different ways and that learning styles vary among cultures. We need to become aware of the psychological difficulties that second language learners may experience due to the classroom setting, age and sex of the teacher, or social status of the student. Native language interference may become a problem as a student's habits may "tempt him to follow the pattern of his own language." In addition to just practicing English, a second language learner should be alerted to "the specifc point at which he may practice with awareness and concentration and monitor his own production with watchfulness until he finds himself producing the target-language forms with ease and accuracy" (A. Newton, 1975, p. 19).

Success in a new language can mean many things. One aspect of success for adult ESL learners is the acquiring of

a decent job which will enable parents to support their families. Therefore, vocational ESL, or the use of relating skills to a job, can be especially important in showing the relevancy of the English language and keeping motivation at a high level.

The goal of a vocational ESL program is not native-like control of the English language, but being able to "understand and use the language to get information; to express one's feeling, thought, and wishes; to socialize; and to perform in English on the job" (Behrens, 1983, p. 51). Such a program reduces the risks of acquiring a second language by "respecting the adults as individuals and by providing a sheltered environment in which adults can practice the new language without fear of humiliation" (Behrens, 1983, p. 55). Students gradually become comfortable with the learning environment and education becomes important instead of something to fear.

Students who find that literacy is tied to survival and job requirements will be more likely to become motivated to learn to read. Examples of job-related reading vocabulary useful to beginning readers may include signs at the work place, employee forms, equipment instructions, and the names of tools and supplies.

Relating ESL to job training can also be important to ESL learners who have been in the United States for several

years and still see themselves confronting a language barrier. Instead of becoming doubtful as to whether they'll ever master the English language, they can recognize the importance of mastering language in a specific job setting. Since adult learners may have work duties, family responsibilities, and community obligations that must be fulfulled, they need language training that is relevant, effective, and efficient (Behrens, 1983).

Even with the constant emphasis on survival skills, cultural orientation, and job-related skills in the ESL classroom, there may still be feelings among adults that they are unable to cope by themselves in many common situations and continued feelings of bewilderment over many aspects of American culture. In many matters, adults are unable to make decisions or to solve problems because they don't understand what the options are (Downing, 1984). It appears that much time is needed to develop understanding of culture and language and also to assist learners in knowing what possibilities exist for them.

Attitude Change

Especially in regard to adult students, it can be assumed that they choose to attend ESL classes because they're interested in learning a new language. They arrive with high hopes and motivation, wanting to experience success. One problem in keeping interest alive is when ESL

students are placed in a multilevel class in which they are behind other ESL students (Bowen, 1979) or in a mainstream classroom where other students are literate in their first language. An atmosphere in which student deficiencies are emphasized or negative racial attitudes are allowed to exist may quickly bring about an attitude change in learners.

Higher-order cognitive and social skills needed to learn effectively in school are often acquired and constantly developed and supported in the home. Especially children who lack this knowledge stand out in the school environment as low achievers. In addition, such things as skin color, phonetic patterns, physical appearance, kinetic behavioral characteristics, and other subtle cultural aspects may cause students to feel alienated (Trueba, 1987).

While adopting to a new culture, ESL students also need to continue learning at the level at which they were operating before immigrating to the United States. If the lack of English forces them to stop learning at that level, or if they are treated as "incompetent, stupid, or under-achieving," their perception of their own academic ability and personal worth will suffer "irreparable damage." "These minority students will never have confidence in themselves, feel competent enough to do their school work, or knowledgeable enough to compete with their mainstream peers" (Trueba, 1987, p. 2).

Therefore, students who may initially attend achool with the idea they will only be learning a new language, may become frustrated when they discover they are also encountering a totally new culture which may be in conflict with their own. This conflict in learning a second culture may have "profound psychological and social consequences for both children and adults" (Saville-Troike, 1975, p. 83).

Negative attitude change may also occur due to the language itself. Cross-cultural misunderstandings may develop when the meanings of words in two languages are assumed to be the same, but reflect differing cultural patterns (Saville-Troike, 1975). Other words don't always have direct meaning equivalents in another language. Students may also err in knowing when to use various synonyms that differ in connotation (Barnitz, 1985).

For students learning to read a second language, the lower-level structural aspects of the text may occupy their attention, thereby preventing them from accessing meaning. Contextual clues will be more difficult to decifer when students don't have the background knowledge to construct meaning. These readers must struggle with the content in addition to the language (Barnitz, 1985). Knowledge regarding text structure and story structure may also be lacking.

Second language learners may misinterpret information due to the influence of cross-cultural schemata in which readers recall information about a culturally unfamiliar text, naturally distort information, and insert ideas from their own culture (Barnitz, 1985). An ESL learner might also fall back on the rules of his first language which could be in conflict with English. Other sources of errors in learning English include over-generalization, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of rules, and false hypotheses concerning the language (Massad & Lewis, 1975). Other barriers might include literary style, idioms, and transitional words. Therefore, students who were excellent readers in their first language may become frustrated if they don't advance in English. With all the initial goodwill toward the new language, they may feel failures at achieving a fluent command of English. They find there are irregularities and exceptions in the new language which seem devoid of logic and common sense (Mackey, 1973).

Repeated failure and frustration will produce anxiety or despair which may inhibit the ability to concentrate and absorb new material (Massad & Lewis, 1975). Practices which assure failure such as overcorrecting of errors, negatively discussing a student's lack of progress in his presence, unrealistic expectations, and use of reading material at a

student's frustrational level, must be avoided. Teachers should be aware of cultural implications when selecting assignments since what's regarded as easy in one country may be regarded as difficult in another (Massad & Lewis, 1975). Students may be measuring themselves by standards set in birth countries rather than those used in the United States.

The way students feel about English may also cause attitudes to change. When enough English has been acquired in order to make communication possible, students may not feel the importance of striving for perfection when they can already be understood (Bowen, 1979). Other students who have acquired a level of competency enabling them to think or dream in English may experience feelings of fear or unrest, feeling guilty about becoming separated from their native language. In an attempt to regain the stable ground and security of the mother tongue and culture, "there may be temporary periods when interest is low and some mild hostility appears toward the foreign language" (A. Newton, 1975, p. 23). Still other students may have reached a plateau in learning in which progress slows or ceases for a time (Massad & Lewis, 1975). A temporary setback may cause students without confidence in themselves as learners to prematurely resign themselves as being poor students.

A change in attitude may also stem from subtle patterns of prejudice that ignore the existence of minority cultures

as well as more hostile, obvious acts of discrimination. Estrada and Vasquez (1981) feel that the multicultural nature of American society has been often ignored, instead promoting through educational policy a homogenized citizen, functional to the policy and economy of the dominant society. If minority individuals accept the negative stereotypes of their ethnic group, they may try to disassociate from their own background, thereby causing psychological damage to self-esteem and identity.

Strategies

Considering the cultural and educational problems that may threaten an Asian student's attitude toward learning English, certain strategies should prove useful in assisting Asian students feel motivated and comfortable, particularly in the area of reading.

Of great benefit to Asian and other students would be the use of multicultural or multiethnic education at every level. According to Banks (1988), research indicates that children become aware of racial differences at an early age. They express negative racial attitudes which become more negative as they grow older unless efforts are made to influence attitudes in a positive direction. In addition, Banks states we can fully understand our own cultures better only by viewing them from the perspectives of other racial and ethnic cultures.

Banks (1988) defines multiethnic education as an attempt to acquaint each ethnic group with the unique cultures of other ethnic groups and to help ethnic group members see that other cultures are just as meaningful and valid as their own. "Multiethnic education assures that with acquaintance and understanding, respect may follow" (p. 35).

Under a multiethnic system, students would be encouraged to maintain their ethnic identities but at the same time function effectively within the common culture. The lives of all students should be enriched by learning of perspectives existing within various ethnic groups.

Curriculum used in ESL and mainstream classrooms should respect the ethnicity of students and use it in positive ways but not force students to feel ethnic. If only cultural elements of minority cultures that seem strange and different are introduced, students are likely to conclude that cultural characteristics different from their own are indeed strange and unusual and believe that many minority people share few characteristics with them (Banks, 1988).

Another important factor in maintaining a positive attitude is the continued use of background knowledge while at the same time building new vocabulary. Since prior knowledge can influence interpretation of text, students who are encouraged to draw on such knowledge will be more

successful. The less unfamiliar readers are with the concepts or content to the text, the more they will struggle to construct meaning. Therefore, students need to become familiar with not only vocabulary but also social relationships, the function of language in different social settings, and the conventions of print in reading. "The more world knowledge readers gain, the better access they will have to information in text, for the goodness of match between the knowledge the author has presumed of the reader and that actually possessed by the reader" (Barnitz, 1985, p. 14).

Rather than seeing reading as just word recognition, students who call on prior knowledge can quickly establish the potential meaning of a sentence and exclude alternative meanings. The choices available to the reader cannot exceed his or her personal or vicarious experience. "Thus, for example, in order to fictionalize an event and one's own role as a reader, one must have an accumulation of cultural cues based on the relatively common experiences of readers for whom the text was intended" (Trueba, 1987, p. 8). Making sense of text becomes difficult when the message is meaningless due to lack of essential background information.

By providing occasions for students to use prior knowledge, a sense of belonging of the language can be developed to help students feel comfortable about their

second language. Natural situations and contexts which students can find identity and relevance offer opportunities for "intellectual understanding" (A. Newton, 1975, p. 24). Instead of solely drilling on vocabulary, learners are encouraged to agree, contradict, ask questions, and give information.

Possibly the strongest source of a sense of success comes from the teacher. Since the teacher in Asian cultural traditions is a "highly significant person" whose opinion is valued, his or her indifference toward a native language or culture could easily be internalized by students who could begin to reject themselves and their elders (Inn, 1983. p. 173). Influencing the racial feelings, perceptions, behaviors, and attitudes of classroom teachers would have a profound impact on the social atmosphere of the school and attitudes of students. The ways in which teachers present material can highly influence how minority individuals are viewed (Banks, 1988).

"The most powerful incentive students can have is the belief that their teacher believes they have ability. With this type of understanding, students feel they can do anything that is required of them and do it with merit" (Sims, 1981, p. 133). Such teachers deal with culturally different students by developing appropriate assessment tools and using innovative teaching methods. Academic tasks

are challenging, but have assured built-in success. In spite of past shortcomings, teachers who respect students' abilities and believe in potential can motivate students to face academic obstacles with greater confidence (Sims, 1981).

Getting to know the past life of students, their point of view, purpose, and general immigrant background will be helpful in showing students interest and understanding (Mackey, 1973). A positive and enthusiastic image of the teacher can create a pleasant learning environment which will increase the opportunity for student participation (Bowen, 1979). The teacher should take responsibility for the classroom atmosphere, adapt the curriculum to meet student needs, and discuss problems with students when necessary.

Knowing that the committing of errors is a normal, healthy process, teachers need to accept this process and provide proper feedback (Bowen, 1979). Our educational system can make aspects of the dominant culture a meaningful part of students' experience without displacing or conflicting with the corresponding parts of their native cultures (Saville-Troike, 1975). A comfortable environment will help students in taking risks, knowing they won't be ridiculed but will instead learn.

In situations where the teaching staff and administrators aren't members of the minority group, students may feel the lack of role models in their ethnic background. Therefore, the use of curriculum and textbooks which describe the contributions of minority individuals can assist in proving that minority students are not less significant or less valued than individuals of European heritage (Inn, 1983).

Summary

This review of research began with an overview of the magnitude of the problem with a discussion of the number of refugees located in the United States, along with others seeking asylum. The definition of refugee and statistics relating to median age and ethnic groups were given. It was shown that many adjustment problems exist that should be of concern to educators.

Literature dealing with the cultural backgrounds of Asian students was investigated in order to discover explanations for difficulties in school adjustment. The differences between the Asian and American educational systems were also investigated. In addition, the special problems of nonliterate adult learners were discussed. This review of research reveals several possible reasons as to the causes of changes in attitude among Asian English as a Second Language students and stategies to assist students

are provided. In order to further investigate the self-perceptions of ESL students as to attitudes specifically regarding reading, a survey was prepared and administered.

CHAPTER III

METHOD AND PROCEDURES

Included in this chapter is information about design, subjects, instrument, procedure, and data analysis. The purpose of the study is to identify factors influencing reading attitudes in Asian ESL learners. A major method of locating information in identifying such factors was a review of literature. An additional method used was a questionnaire to provide information which should prove useful in supporting research and providing examples of student opinion.

Subjects

Subjects under the study consist of SE Asian individuals 18 years old or older residing in Decorah, Iowa. Names were received from the English as a Second Language class at Northeast Iowa Community College. All subjects were contacted individually and the purpose of the study was explained. Subjects were asked to participate in order to provide information which should prove helpful with future Asian students. Thirty subjects were surveyed.

Instrument

A survey was designed to provide information regarding the reading self-perceptions of local Asian adults. The survey was reviewed by thesis committee members; Dr. Ned

Ratekin, Dr. Jeannie Steele, and Dr. Cheryl Roberts. The University of Northern Iowa Graduate College also reviewed the survey and a request for approval was made and granted. A copy of the survey is included in Appendix A.

Subjects were asked to provide demographic information such as age, sex, country of birth, length of time in the United States, amount of education in birth country and the United States, and languages fluently spoken and written.

The format allowed subjects to agree or disagree with statements, provide demographic information, and write short answers. Using a varied format assisted subjects in providing information in different ways. The short answer section was designed to allow subjects a vehicle for expressing their personal feelings regarding reading. Demographic information should prove useful in comparing reading attitudes among subjects of various backgrounds, age groups, education, experience, and length of time in the United States.

Procedure

Surveys were administered to subjects informally in a variety of settings by either the researcher or the ESL instructor. Subjects had the option to complete surveys at home or in the classroom setting. Respondents answered questions in a written form. However, questions were

explained orally to anyone asking for assistance. A personal follow-up was given to those not responding.

Analysis of Data

Data were analyzed in terms of demographic information to discover if such background was relevant to reading attitudes of subjects. The self-perceptions of subjects regarding reading was analyzed to discover causes for their positive and negative reading attitudes.

The collected data were coded, entered, and verified through Information Systems and Computing Services at the University of Northern Iowa. The VAX Computer System, available at the Computing Center, was used to help organize and analyze the data.

The data collected were examined to determine possible correlations between demographic information and responses regarding the importance of reading. Comparisons were made as to whether differences in such areas as age, sex, birth country, or amount of education related to reading attitudes of the subjects participating in this study. In addition, short answers of respondents regarding their self-perceptions of themselves as readers will be analyzed and discussed.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This study was conducted to identify factors influencing reading attitudes in Asian ESL learners in order to better understand possible reasons why attitudes may change and ways they may be influenced. Sources of information which provided answers to questions in the study were gained from a review of literature and a survey to verify the literature. Results of this investigation are presented in this chapter.

One of the purposes of the study was to discover what cultural differences appear to have an impact on attitude. As indicated in the review of literature, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (1982) presents examples of cultural differences between Asian and American learners which may cause misunderstandings. These include such aspects as using polite evasion rather than assertiveness in resolving conflicts, expecting teachers to be all-knowing instead of feeling comfortable questioning a teacher, and accepting one's life rather than trying to change it. Dinh (1981) points out the importance of preserving harmony in the Asian culture, which may cause students to agree to things they don't want. Other problems arise due to diverse

cultural aspects between English and the native language and the time it takes, particularly with older students, to learn English (Mackey, 1973). Conflicting messages between home and school (Christian, 1983) confuse students further and a general culture shock (Indochinese Clearinghouse, 1978) may bring about strong emotional reactions against the English language and culture, which may make learning even more difficult.

Of the 30 students surveyed for the study, there were 21 individuals who were from in Laos while 9 were from Vietnam. Various ethnic groups were included among these subjects. Students from Vietnam and Laos completing the survey similarly responded positively to statements regarding the importance of reading in both the native language and English, with only one student in disagreement. Since results between the two groups were so similar, a statistical evaluation was not warranted.

A second purpose of the study was to discover what educational differences appear to have an impact on attitude. The review of literature indicated that American teachers are not always trained regarding the special needs of culturally diverse students (Saville-Troike, 1975) or the active teaching of a second culture. Misunderstandings may arise due to the Asian tradition of relying more on imitation rather than experimentation in school (Wei, 1977),

the use of inappropriate curriculum (Duong, 1975), unfamiliar testing procedures (Massad & Lewis, 1975), and limited parental involvement (Yao, 1988). The lack of multicultural materials also appears to have an impact on attitude.

Subjects in the survey were of ages ranging from 18 to over 60. Since comparing statements regarding the importance of reading to demographics on the amount of education received in the birth country or in the United States and ages of subjects did not produce diverse answers, further statistical evaluation was not warranted. Of the subjects surveyed, 86% strongly agreed and 10% agreed that reading is important in both English and the birth country, while 73% felt reading to be necessary for survival in the United States. Subjects were also asked to list languages and dialects fluently spoken, read, and written. Most students in all levels of fluency, including fluency in native languages and English, felt reading to be important in English and the native language. In fact, of the 30 subjects surveyed, only one subject disagreed that reading was important. These findings seem to verify the general importance of education in SE Asia (Wei, 1977).

A third purpose of the study was to examine the causes of change in attitude among Asian students. Both the review

of literature and the survey were used as sources of information in suggesting causes.

In the review of literature it was discovered that subtle cultural aspects as well as such things as physical appearance, lack of social skills, and phonetic patterns may cause Asian ESL students to feel alienated (Trueba, 1987). Students who originally attend school thinking they will only be learning a new language, may become frustrated when they discover they must also learn a new culture which may be in conflict with their own (Saville-Troike, 1975). Misunderstandings may occur due to feelings of incompetence (Trueba, 1987) or due to the language itself. Conflicts may arise because of differing cultural patterns between languages (Saville-Troike, 1975) or differing connotations of words (Barnitz, 1985). Students placed in situations where they experience repeated failure and frustration will also be apt to experience a change of attitude (Massad & Lewis, 1975). Hostility may even develop toward English in students who feel guilty that their new language is separating them from their native language (A. Newton, 1975).

Subjects completing the survey indicated several reasons for attitude change. Although the survey results were similar across age groups, gender, amount of education, or length of time in the United States regarding the feeling

of importance of reading skills, the short answer section revealed many interesting insights.

Even though most subjects strongly agreed that reading was important in their native language and English, three subjects estimated daily reading time to be quite minimal (5 to 12 minutes). Three subjects left the question blank and an additional three subjects stated their reading time to be "not much." This indicates that some subjects may have answered statements regarding reading as to what they thought the answers should be rather than their true feelings.

One problem commonly mentioned by subjects was difficulty with pronunciation. "Some words in English are hard for me to pronounce, so it makes me give up sometimes." "Sometimes I don't understand how to read or pronounce English. It's very difficult for me, just like walking up a hill." "It's hard for me to sound out long words." "The hardest thing for me is when there are new words that come across and they are hard to pronounce."

Such statements indicate that some students may not recognize the main purpose of reading as discovering meaning but feel it's more important to sound out words. However, one difference between ESL and mainstream students is that ESL students are learning to speak English in addition to developing reading skills. Oral skills are especially vital

in communicating in survival situations and this was emphasized in survey results. Even though subjects were asked to describe strengths and weaknesses in reading English, several subjects also discussed oral communication.

"When I can't speak English I get many troubles because most American people don't understand me, then cannot help me with anything." "My weakness is not knowing how to say words clearly so that people can understand me." It appears that some students have difficulty concentrating on reading when they feel a stronger need to communicate orally.

Other weaknesses discussed by subjects include lack of vocabulary and problems with grammar. Some subjects discussed grammatical difficulties due to differences between languages. "I can read but I don't understand some words because English doesn't have the same word for different tenses like do, did, done. In our native language we can read and speak very well because every word is the same." (Apparently the subject means that the verb tenses don't change in his language.) Another subject stated she had problems with the use of "s" in singular and plural nouns and with past and present participles of words, forms not present in her native language.

Not understanding what was read was another area of frustration for subjects. "I can read English but I don't understand what those words mean." "Some words I can

pronounce but not understand." Again, such students may be concentrating on pronunciation rather than reading for meaning. Words with various meanings and connotations plus homonyms appear to be particularly difficult to master. "I always use the dictionary in my reading but some words are very tricky and always confuse me."

Another subject expressed his frustration in reading English in some detail:

> English is very difficult for me in reading to understand. If I don't know how to read the meaning, I want to give up in my reading and my weakness is falling asleep when I don't understand. Nothing is hard or difficult for me to read in my native language. I used to read a lot at school. It was fun to read the story, just like you're reading English.

This subject appears to verify findings from the review of literature which discuss feelings of frustration that develop when students who were excellent readers in their first language don't quickly advance in English (Mackey, 1973). Interest in learning English could decline significantly as students read without discovering meaning. Reading might even be perceived as being boring and prevent students from trying as suggested by another subject. "The thing that makes me not want to read is that I don't understand the words. Sometimes it's too boring or depressing when you don't understand."

A third subject provided similar feelings. "I fall asleep when reading English. Reading in my native language is more enjoyable and exciting."

Subjects also realized that text without meaning to them can cause motivation to decline. "My strength in reading English is that I like to read the things that are important and interesting to me. My weakness in reading is I don't like to read uninteresting topics."

Hostility toward a second language may develop when students feel they're being separated from their mother tongue (A. Newton, 1975). Although some subjects completing the survey were illiterate in their native language, others expressed concern at forgetting their first language. "When I came to the United States I could read my own native language but now I can't read it."

Other frustrations involving learning to read discussed by subjects included lack of time, forgetting words previously learned, and not reading as well as "American people." One subject felt that reading skills depend on how long people have lived in the United States. Student comments also implied lack of confidence in themselves. Three subjects named their strengths in reading English as "none" and one student obviously struggling with the language stated, "I can never" read English.

A fourth problem addressed by this study is how attitudes affect reading behavior. The review of literature indicates that student esteem may suffer "irreparable damage" (Trueba, 1987, p. 2) if treated as underachieving or incompetent. Lower-level structural aspects of the text may occupy the attention of second language learners, thereby preventing them from accessing meaning (Barnitz, 1985). Irregularities and exceptions in the English language cause students to further withdraw from the reading process. Repeated failure and frustration may inhibit learner ability to concentrate and absorb new material (Massad & Lewis, 1975).

The survey administered to local subjects indicated that the purpose for reading varies among individuals. Different purposes for reading included reading newspapers to understand what's happening in the world, to prepare for college, read directions and signs, fill out job applications, general communication, prepare for the future, understand letters and other mail, read magazines for information, and read the Bible. Only two subjects mentioned reading novels for enjoyment. Six subjects indicated they read only during class, and three subjects stated that the length of time spent reading each day depended on the amount of homework.

Of the students surveyed, 83% agreed or strongly agreed that improving reading skills was important to them when they first came to the United States, while 92% felt reading to be important at the present time. Survey results were similar regarding the importance of reading among different age groups, gender, or amount of education acquired. Several subjects expanded on their feelings about the importance of reading. One subject who came to the United States as a child and was illiterate in her native language stated:

> Reading is the most important thing that I have learned. Through reading, you could learn a skill that you have never known before, and reading enriches my life because each time I read, I learn something new. I don't think my life would be as productive if I hadn't known how to read. To me, being able to read is as important as living.

Another subject saw lack of reading as life threatening:

> Reading means a lot and we use it anywhere; at school at work, driving, and traveling away. Reading helps me a lot to do things, understand, and shows me how and where. Reading tells me something good and bad and the most important is when you use and take something without reading you might kill yourself.

Several individuals felt the relevance of reading was directed toward employment and technology.

> I think that reading is very important in my life because at this point I was in a modern country situation. Such as when I am on a job, I have to read a lot of directions and information about things that I will be working on.

A similar comment was made that:

> Reading is very important for the people who would like to improve their second language or their own language. It will help me to understand about grammar and the deep meaning. It's very useful for me in improving the good skills or technology in any business.

Other subjects could see how much their reading skills have improved and were optimistic about future improvement. Comments including, "I use English in reading every day" and "everything requires reading" verify student perception of the importance of reading. One student summed up feelings about reading by stating, "I think reading is very important to me because in this world you have to know how to read and write to survive."

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

The summary, discussion, and implications of the study and review of literature are presented in this chapter. The purpose of this study was to identify factors influencing reading attitudes in Asian ESL learners in order to better understand possible reasons why attitudes may change and ways they may be influenced. In this chapter, a brief summary of the problem is given. Findings of the study are then discussed. Finally, implications of the research are considered.

Summary

Due to the influx of refugees into the United States during the past several years, new challenges have been faced by educators who work with students learning a second language. In order to better assist such students, research has shown the importance of understanding students' cultural background and using prior knowledge to help students comprehend English.

A study was conducted using a questionnaire to discover the self-perceptions and attitudes of Asian ESL adults regarding reading. This study gave students the opportunity to express personal feelings about themselves as readers and

discuss the importance of reading. Questions asked in the study were answered through the review of literature and were then verified by questionnaire results.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate there are a multitude of complicated factors influencing reading attitudes in Asian English as a Second Language learners. Loss of motivation appears to be wrapped up in cultural needs and conflicts relating to the difference between educational backgrounds in Asian cultures and the United States. The review of literature indicated that the burden of assisting learners in keeping positive attitudes about reading remains with the teacher.

ESL learners are at a disadvantage when compared with native speakers of English. Students don't have the necessary background through which to learn, teachers don't always have the vocabulary to help second language learners understand, and learners may become confused when taught ideas different than what they were raised believing (Mackey, 1973). In addition, conflicting messages may be received from family members and school personnel (Chrisitan, 1983).

ESL students need adjust to not only a new language, but also a new culture. Conflicts arise when learners don't

feel accepted by individuals in the new culture and when their ideas about the new language don't match reality. Misunderstandings easily arise due to cross-cultural differences in languages (Saville-Troike, 1975). Such difficulties can cause students to experience low self-esteem and loss of interest in learning a new language because they may feel like failures at achieving a fluent command of English (Mackey, 1973).

A survey administered to 30 ESL students located in one specific geographic area was used to verify the review of literature by asking subjects to answer questions regarding their self-perceptions as readers. In addition to reporting demographic information and a short answer section, subjects were asked to respond by strongly agreeing, agreeing, strongly disagreeing, disagreeing, or remaining neutral to five statements; reading is important in my native language, reading is important in English, reading is not necessary for survival in the U.S., improving reading skills was important to me when I first came to the U.S., and improving reading skills is very important to me now. Survey results indicated similarities in attitudes across age, gender, country of birth, length of time in the United States, amount of education in the birth country or the United States, and the number of languages fluently spoken or read. Data analysis showed that 86% of the subjects

strongly agreed and 10% agreed that reading was important in the native and second language and only two subjects felt that reading was not necessary for survival in the United States.

In the short answer section of the survey, subjects indicated that negative attitudes regarding reading develop due to difficulty concentrating on reading when they feel a stronger need to communicate orally, not understanding what was read, feelings of being separated from their native language, and lack of time to learn a second language. Respondent answers indicated that some students may experience difficulties because they feel the purpose of reading is to pronounce individual words rather than understand the meaning of what was read.

Survey results also showed that the purpose for reading varies among individuals. Therefore, what is relevant to one student may not be of importance to another.

Even though frustrations were discussed regarding learning to read English, several positive comments were made supporting the multiple choice section where students strongly agreed about the important of reading. In general, reading was regarded as a means of survival in our technological society.

Implications

Results from this study support various implications for assisting English as a Second Language learners. Possibly the most powerful source of assisting in the retention of positive attitude is the teacher. Due to the high amount of respect given teachers in Asian cultures (LIRS, 1982), American teachers are in an excellent position to encourage Asian students. Knowing students' backgrounds and culture is necessary in understanding student frustration and problems and showing students that they are interesting individuals. Teacher knowledge can also assist in the unintentional put-down of native culture or embarrassment, creating unity between the home and school, and helping students to make the right choices in a new society. Teachers can also influence the social atmosphere of the school and attitudes of mainstream students (Banks, 1988).

A second implication developing from the study is providing relevant materials for student use. Students need to deal with information that has a purpose, is interesting, and carries meaning to individual students (Nuttall, 1982).

Nonliterate adult learners have special problems as they often need to raise and support a family in addition to learning a new culture and language from the basics. Especially in families where children are acquiring English

skills more rapidly that their parents, adults may feel humiliation at not better understanding the language (Behrens, 1983).

One way of assisting such learners is the use of vocational ESL, or the relating of skills to employment. Such a program will provide students with mastery of the language in a specific job setting and show language training to be relevant and useful (Behrens, 1983).

Another strategy in assisting not only ESL learners, but also mainstream learners, is the use of multicultural or multiethnic education at every level to help all students to understand their own culture as well as other cultures and steer attitudes in a positive direction (Banks, 1988). Under such a program, all curriculum would respect the ethnicity of students from every culture and promote understanding.

Positive attitudes can also be maintained by the continued use of background knowledge and student interest. Students with prior knowledge can better establish potential meaning in reading as they draw from their experiences (Trueba, 1987). A sense of belonging develops as students become more comfortable with their second language (A. Newton, 1975). As indicated by the survey, individual students perceive the purpose of reading differently as they come from different backgrounds and hold diverse interests.

Therefore, knowing each student as an individual would be most valuable.

While this study has identified some factors influencing reading attitudes in Asian ESL learners, further research would be helpful. Although the survey appeared to support the previous research, it was administered to a small number of local individuals. Providing a larger sample from different geographical locations might produce additional information. The use of an assessment device to test reading ability might be useful in comparing results to students' self-perceptions as readers. A follow-up study to assess further change in attitude would also prove interesting.

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APPENDIX A

Please answer the following questions in your own words.

1. How well can you read in your own language?

2. How well can you read in English?

3. Do you think your reading skills are the same, better, or less than other people your age?

4. Estimate how much time you read each day.

5. What types of material do you read? (i.e., textbooks, newspapers, novels, magazines, etc.)

6. Describe your strengths and weaknesses in reading English.

7. Describe your strengths and weaknesses in reading your native language.

8. Explain what reading means to you at this point in your life.

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Please circle the appropriate response: strongly agree (1), agree (2), neutral (3), disagree (4), or strongly disagree (5).

	SA	A	N	D	SD
a) Reading is important in my native language.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
b) Reading is important in English.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
c) Reading is not necessary for survival in the U.S.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
d) Improving reading skills was important to me when I first came to the U.S.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
e) Improving reading skills is very important to me now.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

READING SURVEY

Preliminary Information:

Name (optional): _____

Age: _____18-21 _____22-25 _____26-29
_____30-35 _____36-39 _____40-45
_____46-49 _____50-55 _____50+

Sex: _____Male _____Female

Country of birth: _____

Length of time in the U.S.:
_____Less than one year _____5-6 years
_____1-2 years _____7-8 years
_____3-4 years _____9 years +

Amount of education in birth country:
_____Less than 1 year _____5-6 years
_____1-2 years _____7-8 years
_____3-4 years _____9 years +

Length of education in U.S.:
_____Less than 1 year _____5-6 years
_____1-2 years _____7-8 years
_____3-4 years _____9 years +

List languages and dialects you fluently speak:
1. _____ 3. _____
2. _____ 4. _____

List languages you fluently read and write:
1. _____ 3. _____
2. _____ 4. _____